



Ireland

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles, and its population is approximately four million. The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official government statistics from the 2002 census, the religious affiliation of the population was 88.4 percent Roman Catholic (3,462,606), 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (115,611), 0.55 percent Christian (unspecified), 0.52 percent Presbyterian (20,582), 0.25 percent Methodist (10,033), 0.49 percent Muslim (19,147), and less than 0.1 percent Jewish (1,790). Approximately 5.5 percent (217,358) of the population stated no preference or adherence to a particular religion.

The number of immigrants increased, and they tended to be non-Catholic. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin. Immigrants and noncitizens encountered few difficulties in practicing their faiths.

According to a survey, which included Northern Ireland, conducted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, approximately 60 percent of the 4, 171,000 Irish and Northern Irish Roman Catholics attended Mass once a week and 220,000 attended Mass once a day. The Conference reported that there was a noticeable increase in attendance during Christmas and Easter holidays and around the time of the death of Pope John Paul II.

Section II. Status of Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution prohibits promotion of one religion over another and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the Government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion, and there was no discrimination against nontraditional religious groups. There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religion or religious group.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including religion. The Equality Authority works toward continued progress in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality in employment. The Equal Status 2000 Act prohibits discrimination outside of employment (such as in education or provision of goods) on the same grounds cited in the Employment Equality Act.

While Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, it was not favored officially or in practice. Because of the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and some Catholic holy days are also national holidays.

The following religious holy days are considered national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day. These holidays did not negatively affect any religious group. The Government does not require but does permit religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management were governed partially by trustees within the Catholic Church or in some cases, the Church of Ireland. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003, the Equality Authority published a booklet that states that church-linked schools are permitted legally to refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion, providing the school can prove that the refusal is essential to maintain the "ethos" of the school (i.e., too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim "ethos"). However, there were no reports of any children being refused admission to any school for this reason. The Government permitted homeschooling, but few parents chose this educational option.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion. There were no incidents of forced conversion of minor U.S. citizens or of their abduction or illegal removal from the United States or of refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2004, in an effort to reach out across community and faith lines, the government invited key religious leaders, including the imam from a prominent mosque, to take part in the country's presidential inauguration. In December 2004, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, in line with a proposed EU Constitution Interfaith initiative, announced the development of a new interfaith dialogue (yet to begin). In March 2005, government officials attended and took part in a "Muslims in Ireland Today" conference held at a prominent mosque in the country. In addition, the Garda (the police) Racial and Intercultural Office placed 145 Ethnic Liaison Officers around the country to advise police and monitor policing activity in light of the increasing number of ethnic and religious groups that are immigrating to the country.

The U.S. Embassy's initiative promoting Thanksgiving as a day of celebration among communities of faith encouraged the Government and media to develop an outreach to minority religious groups.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society largely was homogenous; as a result, religious differences were not tied to ethnic or political differences. Various religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions had activities or projects designed to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions.

There were reports of four acts of vandalism on the Irish Jewish Museum and Jewish markers in a cemetery. Culprits have yet to be identified.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In September 2004, the U.S. Embassy began its Muslim Outreach program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country, and Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met regularly with Muslims. Embassy officials also met with the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, the head of the Egyptian Coptic church, and prominent leaders from both Catholic and Protestant faiths. The Embassy's interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue among governmental, NGO, religious, and community leaders.

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